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Article (Published Version)

Danewid, Ida (2021) Policing the (migrant) crisis: Stuart Hall and the defence of whiteness. Security Dialogue. pp. 1-17. ISSN 0967-0106

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Policing the (migrant) crisis: Stuart Hall and the defence of whiteness

Security Dialogue

1–17

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DOI: 10.1177/0967010621994074

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Abstract

Over the last two decades, the European border regime has become the subject of a growing body of scholarship in critical security studies. In this article, I draw on Stuart Hall's work on racialized policing, authoritarian populism and conjunctural analysis to argue that this literature has paid insufficient attention to the close relationship between racism, capitalism and state violence. Writing at the dawn of Thatcherism and neoliberal globalization, Hall theorized the growth in repressive state structures as a revanchist response to breakdowns in racial hegemony. Revisiting these insights, the article argues that the ongoing expansion of the European border regime is a hegemonic strategy of racialized crisis management. The imposition of ever more restrictive immigration policies, increased surveillance and heightened forms of deportability are attempts to defend white bourgeois order and to police a (neoliberal) racial formation in crisis. The migrant 'crisis' is ultimately the result of one racialized world order collapsing, and another struggling to be born.

Keywords

Migrant crisis, neoliberalism, racial capitalism, security, Stuart Hall

'The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born;
in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.'

Antonio Gramsci

'The "swing to the right" is not a reflection of the crisis: it is itself a response to the crisis.'

Stuart Hall

Introduction: Migration, the state and law and order

In the lead-up to the 2016 Brexit referendum, the British right-wing nationalist party UKIP unveiled a poster showing refugees from Syria marching across the Slovenian border. The UK is at a 'breaking point', the poster declared: 'We must break free of the EU and take back control of our borders.'

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In portraying migrants as a ‘swarm’, ‘horde’ and ‘menacing crowd’ storming into Europe, the poster seemed to suggest that migrants constitute a threat to British welfare, economic growth, national security and cultural homogeneity. While it has received multiple critiques for its overt racism and xenophobia, the attempt to turn migrants into objects of fear is hardly unique to UKIP. Across the political spectrum, there exists a wide consensus that Europe has been subject to an uncontrollable mass influx of migrants and that this amounts to a ‘crisis’.¹ This moral panic over migration has, in turn, legitimized the intensification of ‘exceptional’ measures aimed at securing Europe’s borders and what some refer to as a ‘proxy war’ against the poor and the paperless (Hintjens and Bilgic, 2019).

In this article I examine the ideological production of migration as a ‘crisis’. Drawing on Stuart Hall’s work on racialized policing, authoritarian populism and conjunctural analysis, I argue that the moral panic surrounding migration is indicative of an underlying crisis in racial hegemony. A relatively neglected thinker in the field of international relations, Hall speaks urgently to the contemporary era of rising right-wing nationalism.² Writing in the 1970s, Hall analysed the breakdown of the British postwar consensus and birth of a new conjuncture characterized by Thatcherism, neoliberal globalization and the law-and-order state. In his classic text of Marxist cultural studies, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, The State, and Law and Order* (Hall et al., 2013), co-authored with four graduate students at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), Hall studied these phenomena through a focus on the moral panic over ‘mugging’ that dominated British media in the 1970s. The rise in crime, the book persuasively shows, was a fiction but quickly spiralled into an intense debate over immigration, integration and (black) crime. Hall (2013: 218) concluded that the social anxieties unleashed by ‘mugging’ had to be seen as a reflection of ‘a more deep-seated historical crisis’. This was the ‘aching loss’ (Gilroy, 2004: 95) of Britain’s empire, the intensification of working class and race radical resistance, and a combination of overlapping socio-economic forces which, by the 1970s, had begun to produce a crisis in the British postwar consensus. As Hall (1979: 15) concludes in a 1979 essay written for *Marxism Today*, the result was a conservative backlash spearheaded by Thatcher and her promise to put the ‘great’ back into Great Britain; ‘a move toward “authoritarian populism” – an exceptional form of the capitalist state – which, unlike classical fascism, has retained most (though not all) of the formal representative institution in place, and which at the same time has been able to construct around itself an active popular consent’. Crucially, this reconstruction of hegemony took place by framing the presence of black and other ethnic minority communities in Britain as *the* underlying problem. By the 1970s they had ‘become the bearers, the signifiers of the crisis of British society. . . the means by which the crisis [was] to be resolved – send it away’ (Hall, 2017: 152).

In the last interview before his death in 2014, Hall wondered what it might mean to do ‘a policing of the crisis now. . . a conjunctural analysis. . . on this moment and put race and crime at the centre of it’ (Jhally, 2016: 337). This article provides a tentative answer to this question through a focus on contemporary debates about the European migrant ‘crisis’. I argue that a Hall-inspired analysis compels us to examine the racial capitalist forces which together have produced migration as a ‘crisis’ and, consequently, to think of the moral panic over migration as indicative of an underlying crisis in hegemony. I trace this crisis to the erosion of the postwar racial contract between capital and white labour – what Du Bois (1998) famously described as the wages of whiteness. These wages have been in decline since the 1980s as a result of deindustrialization, capital flight and outsourcing (Narayan, 2017). While widening class inequality has been a multi-ethnic process – with black and brown women taking the hardest hit (Bassel and Emejulu, 2017) – right-wing nationalist parties have framed this through a racial lens, arguing that migrants and other racialized minorities are the cause of economic decline. Attempting to recreate the racial contract, they have come to rely on the penal and national security state: on the fortification of borders, a tightening of

the deportation regime, heightened forms of surveillance, repressive policing and the creation of 'ghetto laws'. The ideological construction of the migrant as security threat – as potential criminal, terrorist and sexual predator – has been central to this attempt to reconstitute racial hegemony in a time of crisis. If policing the crisis in the 1970s meant clamping down on those understood to have created the crisis – namely, the inner-city black 'mugger' – then it today predominantly means policing the racialized migrant.

In reading the (migrant) crisis through the lens of Hall, this article makes two contributions. First, it examines the erasure of race, empire and (settler) colonialism in the literature on the securitization of migration. Over the last few years, leading approaches in critical security studies, inspired by Schmitt, Foucault and Agamben, have come under criticism for obfuscating the centrality of racial-colonial violence to the making of sovereign 'exceptional' power (Fishel and Wilcox, 2017; Howell and Richter-Montpetit, 2019, 2020; Smith, 2008; Sundberg, 2015; Weheliye, 2014). These critiques not only call into question the Eurocentrism and 'methodological whiteness' (Bhambra, 2017) of this literature, but also demonstrate the importance of 'rerouting' discussions of security through the history of empire, racial capitalism and (settler) colonialism. This article extends these critiques by highlighting the distinctively colonial genealogy of modern immigration restrictions. I argue that critical security scholars incorrectly frame the intensification of migration control as a historical exceptionality, when in reality migrants have always been cast as 'threats' to the (white) nation-state (El-Enany, 2020; Mongia, 2018; Sharma, 2020).

Second, by drawing on cultural studies and, in particular, the work of Stuart Hall, the article outlines an alternative way of conceptualizing the recent expansion of the European border regime. Hall's method of conjunctural analysis offers a novel approach through which to bring together analyses of political economy and security – an area of study which has remained relatively neglected and undertheorized in both critical security studies and international political economy (Best, 2017; Elias, 2015; Owens, 2018). Conjunctural analysis seeks to excavate the historical, ideological and material conditions of the particularities of the present; as Casas-Cortés et al. (2015: 58) explain, it is 'always engaged with the ways in which particular social formations come into being'. Conjunctural analysis should thus not be mistaken for 'a narrowly historicist concern with origins and development', but rather denotes a critical concern with 'the ways in which tensions, contradictions, and crises are negotiated in specific social formations' (Casas-Cortés et al., 2015: 58). Through conjunctural analysis, Hall was able to show that the Thatcherist roll-out of new forms of discipline and control was an ideological attempt to police hegemony and defend white bourgeois order. Applied to the migrant 'crisis', conjunctural analysis similarly reveals the expansion of European border security as a hegemonic strategy of racialized crisis management.

The article develops these arguments in three parts. It begins by offering a brief overview of the literature on the securitization of migration, which it argues has paid insufficient attention to the ways in which histories of empire and racial capitalism shape migration control. The second section sets out an alternative approach to the expansion of security regimes – conjunctural analysis – drawn from *Policing the Crisis* and other selected writings by Hall. The third section undertakes a conjunctural analysis of the European migrant 'crisis'. Focusing on the moral panic surrounding the New Year's Eve sexual assaults in Cologne in 2015–2016, I examine the ideological production of migrants as a 'threat' and migration as a 'crisis'. Where critical security scholars have predominantly approached the expansion of European border security through the deracinated lens of the exception (the Copenhagen School) and bureaucratic practices (the Paris School), I argue that Hall helps us see the fortification of borders as a strategic attempt to police a racial formation in crisis. The European migrant 'crisis' is ultimately the result of one racialized world order collapsing, and another struggling to be born.

Race, coloniality and migration control

Over the last three decades, the European border regime has rapidly expanded and intensified – both within, beyond and at the borders of Europe. In 2005, Frontex – the European Border and Coast Guard Agency – began policing the Mediterranean; at that point the border fences in the Spanish North African enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla were already ten years old. In 2013 Frontex was joined by Eurosur, a mass surveillance system that uses data from drones, aircrafts and off-shore sensors to track the movement of ‘illegal’ migrants. As of 2016, the EU operates ten ‘hot-spots’ in Greece and Italy where incoming migrants are identified, fingerprinted and registered, resembling a ‘police war’ against migrants (Neocleous and Kastrinou, 2016). Agreements struck with neighbouring countries – in particular former colonies such as Libya, Morocco, Sudan and Niger – have simultaneously externalized EU migration control in an effort to curtail migration well before migrants reach European territory (Akkerman, 2018). These measures have been accompanied by different forms of community policing and surveillance programmes designed to extend borders into public life *within* Europe (Balibar, 2004; De Genova and Peutz, 2010). The number of people detained and/or deported has simultaneously reached unprecedented levels.³ In the last six years, 20,000 migrants were recorded dead or missing in the Mediterranean (Missing Migrants Project, 2020), turning it into a ‘graveyard for humans and hopes’ (Yousfi, 2020).

In the field of critical security studies, these developments have overwhelmingly been analysed and understood through the lens of biopolitics, governmentality and securitization theory (Bigo, 2007; Doty, 2007; Huysmans, 2000; Salter, 2008). As Alessandra Buonfino (2004: 23) argues, ‘[i]mmigration has turned into one of the greatest security concerns of [the] 21st century’. Attempts to unpack *why* this has happened broadly follow two theoretical trends: namely, the Copenhagen and Paris Schools. Scholars following the Copenhagen School have predominantly focused on the discursive construction of migration as a security threat (Huysmans, 2000; Huysmans and Buonfino, 2008; Van Munster, 2009). Securitization is here understood as the process whereby a political actor employs the rhetoric of existential threat to push an area of ‘normal’ politics into the security realm, thereby legitimizing the use of exceptionalist measures (Buzan et al., 1998: 23). While some insist that European states began to frame migrants as security threats in the early 1990s (Huysmans, 2000), most critical security scholars agree that the 11 September attacks provided an opportunity for legitimizing exceptionalist measures targeting migrants (Guild, 2003; Huysmans and Buonfino, 2008; Karyotis, 2007).

In contrast, Paris School adherents, drawing on Foucault and Bourdieu, have argued against a narrow focus on juridical exceptionalism, warning that this obscures the social production of exceptionalist policies (Diez and Squire, 2008; Huysmans, 2008; Neal, 2009). Didier Bigo (2011: 50), for example, has suggested that we need ‘to go beyond the debate of the exception as a “moment” of decision or as the opposite of a “norm”’ and instead ‘analyse it as a specific form of governmentality’. In particular, we need to examine the ‘routines and technologies of control’ (Bigo, 2011: 55) through which exceptionalist policies and practices are put into place. For Bigo (2002: 65–66; see also Neal, 2009), this includes the use of risk assessment, biometric technologies, population profiling, techniques of surveillance and the ethos of the security professional anchored in ‘secrecy and concern for the management of fear or unease’. From this perspective, the recent crisis in migration is a result of a particular ‘governmentality of unease’. That is, the securitization of migration is not only driven by a logic of crisis, emergency and exception, but is also the product of a multitude of the ‘little security nothings’ (Huysmans, 2011) that are embedded in mundane bureaucratic devices, practices and everyday routines.

In recent years these literatures have faced a growing critique from scholars drawing on black, post/decolonial, indigenous and feminist theories. While the European border regime disproportionately targets migrants from the Middle East and North Africa ‘racialized as not-white, and in fact inordinately racialized as Black’ (De Genova, 2017: 1767), the Copenhagen and Paris Schools have largely overlooked the question of how race and coloniality shape migration control. This is problematic as the question of who constitutes a migrant versus who is a legitimate citizen is deeply racialized: indeed, ‘US financiers, Australian backpackers and British “expats” are not, generally, constructed as migrants’ (Anderson et al., 2012: 75). From the development and implementation of the first immigration policies in the Americas in the late 19th century and Oceania and South Africa in the early 20th century, to Enoch Powell’s infamous ‘rivers of blood’ speech in 1968, migration control has always been tied to (settler) colonial practices and coded through classed, raced and gendered notions of desirable and undesirable subjects (Anderson, 2013; Jones, 2016; Loyd et al., 2013; Rodríguez, 2018; Walia, 2014). As Nadine El-Enany (2020), Radhika Mongia (2018) and Nandita Sharma (2020) have shown, the history of immigration restrictions *is* a history of racial-colonial violence.

This deracinated analysis of migration controls is by no means unique to critical security studies; indeed, the wider field of migration studies has similarly come under critique for evading Europe’s racial-colonial history (Danewid, 2017; De Noronha, 2019; Lentin, 2014). The approaches of critical security studies might however be particularly incapable of accounting for these historical continuities. In an influential article, Alison Howell and Melanie Richter-Montpetit (2020) argue that securitization theory starts from the assumption of a peaceful liberal order which is sometimes breached by securitizing actors and institutions. This rests on a Eurocentric reading of history which denies the *longue durée* of enslavement, genocidal violence, colonialism, apartheid and racial capitalism (see also Hartman, 1997; Rodríguez, 2008; Smith, 2008; Sundberg, 2015; Weheliye, 2014). While the Paris School’s focus on mundane bureaucratic practices arguably goes some way towards problematizing the distinction between normality and exceptionalism, it still eschews how and why ‘openness to gratuitous violence [historically has been] attached specifically to Black, indigenous, and other people subject to racist and caste oppression’ (Howell and Richter-Montpetit, 2019: 8). As such, critical security studies lack the conceptual tools to analyse how Europe’s contemporary exclusionary immigration policies might be consistent and continuous with, rather than exceptional to, its normal state of affairs.⁴ To assume a peaceful ‘before’ and posit ‘the current statecraft of immigrant detention as an exceptionality and historical novelty’ is, as Dylan Rodríguez (2008) has argued, to remain caught within the confines of ‘wilful ignorance’.

To recognize these links between contemporary border security and the *longue durée* of racial-colonial violence is of course *not* to suggest that there is nothing new about contemporary migration management. Critical security scholars are obviously right that the scale and intensity of European border enforcement has increased dramatically over the last few decades. ‘To argue otherwise’, writes Noami Paik (2017: 4), ‘is to normalise the terror stoked in millions of people’. Nonetheless, to fully account for this changing terrain of migration politics – that is, for the rapid expansion of the detention estate, the increase in deportation flights, the policing of the Mediterranean and the ways in which these forms of control almost exclusively target non-white, racialized and Muslimified migrants – we must look, not towards security/exceptionalist frameworks, but to scholarship that centres histories of racism, capitalism and colonialism in the production of security threats. In the next section I argue that Stuart Hall’s work has much to offer in this regard. Hall sheds new light on why seemingly ‘exceptional’ forms of state violence such as policing, mass incarceration and surveillance have become a permanent feature of neoliberal racial capitalism. As we shall see, Hall’s writings have important implications for how we think about the current conjuncture of expanding migration control and rising right-wing nationalism.

Conjunctures, crises, cultural studies: Thinking with Stuart Hall

Stuart Hall spent his life ‘between two islands’ (Hall and Schwartz, 2018) – Jamaica and Britain – examining themes of race, crime, postcoloniality, culture and political economy. Writing at the height of decolonization, the resurgence of (white) nationalism and the rise of Thatcherism, Hall took a particular interest in the crisis of postwar welfare capitalism and its relation to racism. In a series of books and essays published in the 1970s and 1980s, he argued that the unravelling of the British welfare state was a result of a crisis in the racial and imperial formation (Hall, 1980, 1988; Hall et al., 2013). The crisis resulted in a new and alarming politics of security: in a punitive law-and-order state bent on defending white bourgeois order by criminalizing black and brown minorities.

What made Hall’s analysis so novel was, in part, that it relied on a specific mode of analysis which later has come to be seen as the hallmark of cultural studies: namely, conjunctural analysis (Bennett, 2016; Grossberg, 2019). Inspired by the work of Gramsci and Althusser, Hall argued that a conjuncture is a ‘period during which the different social, political, economic and ideological contradictions that are at work in society come together to give it a specific and distinctive shape’ (Hall and Massey, 2010: 57). History, Hall explained, ‘moves from one conjuncture to another rather than being an evolutionary flow’. What drives history forward is ‘usually a crisis, when the contradictions that are always at play in any historical moment are condensed, or, as Althusser said, “fuse in a ruptural unity”’ (Hall and Massey, 2010: 57). To think conjuncturally is therefore to focus on the particularities of the present. For Hall, understanding these particularities in turn necessitated an analysis which cuts across political, economic, social and ideological levels, and which situates them within the antagonisms and ruptures of the historical *longue durée*.⁵

Hall first developed these ideas in his co-authored book, *Policing the Crisis*. Published in 1978, a year before Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister, the text borrows from Gramsci’s idea of hegemony to read the New Right in Britain as a hegemonic project attempting to construct a new ‘common sense’ against the rising threat posed by black radical, youth and working class struggles. As Gramsci (2000: 201) had theorized, ‘When an historical period comes to be studied, the great importance of the distinction becomes clear. A crisis occurs, sometimes lasting for decades. This exceptional duration means that incurable structural contradictions have revealed themselves’. Analysing these distinct moments in history, Gramsci argued, was of utmost importance, as it would illuminate ‘the political forces which are struggling to conserve and defend the existing structure’ (2000: 201). It was precisely this that *Policing the Crisis* set out to do: namely, to develop a conjunctural analysis of how racialized state violence emerged as a solution to the 1970s breakdown in hegemony.

The book takes up this challenge through an analysis of the moral panic that dominated British media in the 1970s over so-called ‘mugging’, a term used to invoke street crime committed by black and other ethnic minority youths. As Hall (2013: 17) and his co-authors demonstrate, the moral panic over mugging was clearly ‘at odds with the scale of the threat to which it was a response’: in fact, there was no dramatic spike in crime. Instead, the book goes on to suggest, the strong reactions provoked by mugging had to be seen as a reflection of ‘a more deep-seated historical crisis’ (Hall et al., 2013: 218).⁶ A combination of economic, political, ideological and social factors had by the 1970s come together to produce a breakdown in the postwar consensus over Keynesian economic management and social democracy. These factors included Britain’s loss of empire and declining position in the world economy; heightened working class struggles over labour and employment conditions; postcolonial migration and the rise of Black Power struggles within the metropole (Angelo, 2009; Sivanandan, 1981); the anti-Vietnam war, counter-culture and student movements; the rise of feminism and gay liberation; and the onset of global economic

recession. As Hall explains, the panic over mugging ‘triggered and was fed by wider fears – the youth revolution of the 60s and that Britain was being fundamentally changed by the presence of black people’, fuelling ‘a long-term sense of decline’ (Jaggi, 2000). Together these factors produced a crisis so deep the British state found it impossible to manage ‘without an escalation in the use and forms of repressive state power’ (Hall et al., 2013: 298). This breakdown in hegemony ultimately set the stage for the rise of what Hall described as the ‘exceptional state’: namely, a law-and-order society dependent on control, repressive policing, incarceration, censorship and surveillance. As he explains,

a crisis of hegemony marks a moment of profound rupture in the political and economic life of a society, an accumulation of contradictions. . . Such moments signal, not necessarily a revolutionary conjuncture nor the collapse of the state, but rather the coming of ‘iron times’. . . Class domination will be exercised, in such moments, through a modification in the modes of hegemony. . . and the powerful orchestration. . . of an authoritarian consensus. . . The forms of state intervention thus become more overt and more direct. (Hall et al., 2013: 214)

The crisis was ultimately resolved through restructuring at the economic, political and cultural levels – a project to which Hall gave the name ‘Thatcherism’. Economically, it took shape through the dismantling of the welfare state and global capitalist outsourcing. Politically, it evolved through a shift from consensual to more coercive modes of social control, especially in the sphere of policing and the criminal justice system. Culturally, it sought to regenerate nationalism and ‘Britishness’ by clamping down on ‘permissiveness’ and embracing ‘such themes as authority, law and order, patriotism, national unity, the family and individual freedom’ (Jacques, 1979: 10). Overall, the result was a ‘swing to the Right’, propelled by the message of ‘more policing, tougher sentencing, better family discipline, the rising crime rate as an index of social disintegration, the threat to “ordinary people going about their private business” from thieves, muggers, etc., the wave of lawlessness and the loss of law-abidingness’ (Hall, 1979: 19). As the postwar consensus broke down, a new world-historical formation was born: neoliberalism.

Hall’s analysis of the 1970s conservative backlash in many ways parallels David Harvey’s (2007) account of the rise of neoliberalism, which similarly stresses its counter-revolutionary and revanchist impetus. Yet where Harvey has been criticized for failing to take racism seriously – in short, for writing it off as a form of prejudice or individual discrimination (Issar, 2020; Roediger, 2017) – Hall places it at the centre of his analysis. Racism, he argues, was *precisely* how a new (neoliberal) hegemonic bloc and national consensus were constructed. Anxieties about immigration, integration and the presence of black and other ethnic minority communities provided a ‘prism through which the whole conjuncture could be read symptomatically’ (Hall and Schwartz, 2007: 148). Consent to the coercive police state was ultimately won ‘through race’ and a set of moral panics around (black) crime, disorder and security which together produced the racialized enemy. That is to say, the presence of black and other ethnic minorities in Britain was ideologically constructed as *the* underlying problem. By the 1970s, policing black communities had become ‘synonymous with the wider problem of policing the crisis’ (Hall et al., 2013: 326). Indeed, law and order was needed to maintain ‘social discipline and authority in the face of a conspiracy by the enemies of the state, the onset of social anarchy, the “enemy within”, the dilution of British stock by alien black elements’ (Hall, 1979: 16; see also Gilroy, 2013).

In excavating the social forces that produced the mugging ‘crisis’, *Policing the Crisis* offers an alternative way of thinking about the ideological production of security threats. As Jeremy Gilbert (2019: 9) has argued, what made *Policing the Crisis* so innovative was precisely that it recognized the panic over mugging ‘as symptomatic of the emergence of a new “common sense”: a new set of

widely diffused and shared understandings of the social world'. Through conjunctural analysis, Hall was able to show how the roll-out of new forms of discipline and control was an ideological attempt to police hegemony, rather than a response to 'new' security threats. In short, the mugging 'crisis' had little to do with mugging itself, and everything to do with the underlying social and material forces which, by the mid-1970s, had begun to produce a crisis in the British postwar settlement.

Over the last few years, a number of scholars have turned to Hall's method of conjunctural analysis to explore the rise of mass incarceration in the United States. Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2007), Angela Davis (2017) and Jordan Camp (2016) have drawn on *Policing the Crisis* to examine the US prison-industrial complex as a revanchist response to black freedom struggles and radical social movements. In the next section I build on and extend this literature through a focus on the expansion and intensification of the European border regime. Through a conjunctural analysis of the migrant 'crisis', I argue that the moral panic over migration has produced a racist common sense that sees migrants as the cause of Europe's current socio-economic problems. By situating the panic over migration within the wider crisis in neoliberal racial capitalism, I argue that the migrant 'crisis' – much like the 1970s mugging 'crisis' – is indicative of a larger, underlying crisis in hegemony. In the same way that mugging functioned as the racialized prism through which white fear was articulated and worked through in the 1970s, social anxieties today find voice in and through immigration controls. What Hall described as the law-and-order society has today developed into an expansive penal and national security state with enhanced powers to deport, detain, surveil and abandon.

The enemy within: Policing the (migrant) crisis

In the first few days of January 2016, European media overflowed with shocking and sensationalist stories of sexual assaults allegedly committed by 'dark-skinned' migrants on New Year's Eve in Cologne in Germany. While the number of suspected perpetrators eventually was reduced from 2000 to a couple of dozen, the story was quickly seized upon by politicians and journalists who placed it in the context of the recent European migrant 'crisis'. A larger narrative fuelled by right-wing nationalists soon began to take hold: namely, that Arab and Muslim men overwhelmingly are responsible for sexual violence in Europe. While there is no evidence to support this claim,⁷ Cologne was invoked as 'proof' of the danger migrants from North Africa and the Middle East pose to European (white) women (Daoud, 2016; White, 2016). German news outlets such as *Focus* and *Süddeutsche Zeitung* fronted covers depicting naked white women covered in black hands. Accompanied by an interview with a psychologist speaking about the 'mentality' of Arab men, the title of *Süddeutsche Zeitung*'s article proclaimed that 'Many young Muslims are incapable of relaxed interaction with the opposite sex. For them, it is always a highly sexualized situation' (Davison, 2016). *The New York Times* similarly published an opinion piece by Algerian novelist Kamel Daoud, in which he argued that 'people in the West are discovering, with anxiety and fear, that sex in the Muslim world is sick, and that the disease is spreading to their own lands' (Daoud, 2016). In France, meanwhile, *Charlie Hebdo* published a cartoon depicting two pig-like men chasing two screaming women. Inserted at the top is a picture of Aylan Kurdi, the three-year-old Syrian toddler found dead on a beach in Turkey. 'What would little Aylan have grown up to be?', asks the cartoon. The answer is given at the bottom: 'Ass groper in Germany' (Meade, 2016).⁸

Cologne is obviously not the only moral panic over migration that has swept across Europe in the last few years. Other notable examples include the January 2015 *Charlie Hebdo* shooting and the November 2015 Paris attack which, like the events in Cologne, ignited discussions about the need to enhance European border enforcement (Abbas, 2019; De Genova, 2017). While there is no

evidence to support the claim that migrants pose a threat to European security, gender equality, public order, welfare and so on (Ceyhan and Tsoukala, 2002), European policymakers have responded by introducing new forms of migration control, including new detention centres, surveillance programmes, hostile environment policies, ‘hotspots’ and offshore centres. Less than two months after Cologne, the German Parliament voted to tighten asylum law by accelerating deportations and suspending the right to family reunification for two years for certain migrants (Wagstyl, 2016). In March the same year, the EU–Turkey deal came into force, cutting migration numbers to Europe by returning those who bypass the asylum process in Turkey. In the UK, the Brexit campaign seized on the Cologne story to argue that remaining in the EU placed British (white) women at risk (Mortimer, 2016). As Nicholas De Genova (2017: 1778; see also Mezzadra and Bojadžijev, 2015; Rajaram, 2015) explains, through these moral panics migration has been ‘reconstructed not merely as an “integration” dilemma or an affront to national (or European) “culture”, “values” or “civilization”, but also as an outright menace to law and order and, to one degree or another, a security threat that purportedly legitimates a state of emergency’.

What might it mean to read these developments – not through the lens of security exceptionalism – but through a conjunctural analysis focused on the wider social and material forces which together have produced migration as a ‘crisis’ in need of urgent state intervention? To think conjuncturally about the migrant ‘crisis’ is, as Hall reminds us, to take seriously that moral panics are ‘part of a larger historical drama’ and that ‘their historical contextualisation [is] crucial to understanding their particular meaning’ (Jefferson, 2014: 154). In essence, to conduct a conjunctural analysis of the ideological construction of migrants as security ‘threats’ is to examine the underlying contradictions and antagonisms which are fusing into a ‘ruptural unity’: that is, into a (migrant) crisis which must be policed.

Pointing in this direction, a variety of political economists have emphasized what they see as the *longue durée* conditions for the current moment. Some have argued that the recent rise of European xenophobia, racism and hostility towards migrants must be understood in relation to the global economic collapse of 2008 and the resulting imposition of fiscal austerity, cutbacks to welfare and wage freezes (Castells et al., 2012; Streeck, 2017). Others have argued that ‘the upheavals wrought by inadequately regulated markets’ themselves must be placed in the wider context of Europe’s structural decline since the 1970s (Hopkin, 2017: 477; see also Brown, 2019; Davies, 2014; Jessop, 2017; Virdee and McGeever, 2018). In the words of Nancy Fraser (2015: 189), what we are witnessing ‘is at bottom a crisis of capitalism – or rather, of our current, historically specific form of capitalism: Financialized, globalizing, neoliberal’. As these commentators correctly note, Europe has over the last five decades gone through a process of deindustrialization, global outsourcing and neoliberal restructuring. In this period, Britain has lost six million working-class jobs: in 1957, the proportion of British workers in industrial employment was 48%, compared to just 15% today. In Germany, the fall in industrial employment has been slower than in Britain, but has more than halved since the 1970s (Tomlinson, 2017). In France, there has been a similar decline in the GDP share of the manufacturing industry (Buigues and Cohen, 2020). Throughout Europe, workers have moreover endured a major fall in the real value of their wages over the last decades (Hopkin, 2017: 470). This has been accompanied by the privatization of basic services (including electricity, water and the national rail), a weakening of trade union bargaining power and a shortage in affordable housing. Rising unemployment, precarity, poverty and income inequalities are now standard features of the European landscape: in the 1980s the average income of the richest 10% of Europeans was seven times higher than that of the poorest 10%; today, it is around nine and a half times higher (Keeley, 2015: 3). In the words of Jordan Camp (2016: 16), the neoliberal revolution – analysed by Hall in the 1970s – ‘created an accumulation of wealth and affluence for the few, on

the one hand, and deepened poverty, unemployment, mass homelessness, and declining real wages for poor and working people on the other’.

One result of this process has been an erosion of the Fordist racial contract between capital and white labour; what Du Bois (1998; see also Narayan, 2017; Roediger, 1999) famously referred to as the ‘wages of whiteness’. In an argument closely resembling Hall’s writings on hegemony, Du Bois theorized that the maintenance of colonial and racial capitalism historically had depended on the establishment of a white cross-class alliance. The domestic white underclass, he argued, gave its consent to capitalist exploitation in exchange for a series of concessions. These included higher wages and better working conditions, as well as a ‘public and psychological wage’ enjoyed by virtue of being racialized as white.⁹ While postwar Fordism is often remembered for its universalizing tendencies – captured by the image of the homogenous assembly line – scholars building on Du Bois have shown how racial hierarchy in fact was central to its operation (Esch, 2018; Melamed, 2011; Roediger, 1999). The (near) full employment, high wages and welfare provisions enjoyed by the white male worker under Fordism was, in part, made possible by the disposability and super-exploitation of racialized Others (Martin, 2017). As Elizabeth Esch (2018) has shown, the Ford Motor Company itself relied on racial segregation in its workplaces and supported white supremacist politics – not only in the United States, but also on its rubber plantations in Brazil and South Africa. Workers racialized as non-white were given the most dangerous and difficult jobs, the lowest wages, and were hired and fired at will. While the conditions that today we have come to identify with neoliberalism – including zero-hour contracts, stagnant real wages, high unemployment and rising poverty – might be new to those who previously reaped the benefits of the ‘wages of whiteness’, historically they have been part of the ordinary and everyday experiences of non-white populations. In the words of Leah Bassel and Akwugu Emejulu (2017: 41), ‘the problems of exploitative pay and conditions, insecure work and the barriers to building wealth have long been experienced by minority women, but what is “new” is that middle-class groups’ social protections are now being systematically eroded, so that they resemble (but are not identical to) minority women’s precarious circumstances’. Put differently, what is new about the current conjuncture is not ‘precarization’ per se, but rather that previously economically privileged groups increasingly are being ‘drawn into precarious social and economic circumstances, in which minority women have always had to struggle’ (Bassel and Emejulu, 2017: 40).

Crucially, it is within this context – of a broken contract between capital and white labour and a subsequent racial formation in crisis – that the expansion of European migration control must be analysed and understood. As neoliberal restructuring has eroded the wages of whiteness, a crisis in hegemony has emerged (Narayan, 2017). Although rising unemployment, poverty and class polarization have been a multi-ethnic process – with black and brown women taking the hardest hit (Bassel and Emejulu, 2017; Hozic and True, 2017) – ‘common sense’ narratives fuelled by elites have located the source of Europe’s social, economic and political problems in the presence of racialized migrants and other minorities (Bhambra, 2016; Dawson, 2016; De Noronha, 2019; Valluvan and Kalra, 2019). The ideological construction of the migrant as a security ‘threat’ has been central to this process. Hall’s (1979: 20) words from the 1970s remain relevant here: the far right’s ‘success and effectivity does not lie in its capacity to dupe unsuspecting folk but in the way it addresses real problems, real and lived experiences, real contradictions – and yet is able to represent them within a logic of discourse which pulls them systematically into line with policies and class strategies of the Right’.

The attempt to recreate the racial contract between capital and white labour has thus predominantly relied on a psychological rather than economic concessions, as John Narayan (2017, 2019) has argued incisively: that is, the new wages of whiteness are cultural and ideological, rather than material. Right-wing nationalist parties do not aim to resupply the wages of whiteness through

redistributive policies or by breaking away from the logic of neoliberal globalization. Despite the anti-establishment rhetoric of far-right and xenophobic parties, there are few indicators that they want to break with the neoliberal consensus. Rather, and as Narayan (2017: 2493) correctly notes, renewing the wages of whiteness has come to rely on increased scapegoating of migrants and minorities. The imposition of ever more restrictive immigration policies, heightened forms of surveillance and increasing deportations are attempts to restore the racial contract, *without* challenging the *modus operandi* of neoliberalism (Bhambra et al., 2020). In new but old ways, racism thus remains the prism through which white anxieties – fuelled by structural decline and diminishing white privilege – are articulated and worked through. In the same way that the construction of the black ‘mugger’ was the ideological conductor of the crisis in the 1970s, so today’s crisis is articulated through the policing of the racialized migrant.

Conclusion: The last colonial?

Stuart Hall left Jamaica for Britain in 1951: three years after *Empire Windrush* had docked in Tilbury, but eleven years before Jamaica won its independence in 1962. ‘Sometimes I feel I was the last colonial’, Hall would later reflect (Hall and Schwartz, 2018: 3). With a life that spanned the last decades of European colonialism and saw the rise of a new era of neoliberal globalization, ‘you could say I have lived . . . on the hinge between the colonial and post-colonial worlds’. (2018: 11).

In this article I have argued that Hall’s reflections on this conjuncture generated important insights about the relation between racism, capitalism and state violence. Writing in the 1970s, Hall argued that the rise of Thatcherism and the New Right were propelled by a revanchist consensus that linked the experience of economic decline and rising unemployment to a racialized narrative about the loss of empire, postcolonial migration, the escalation of (black) crime and the need to strengthen the penal and national security state. For Hall, the growth in policing and other repressive state structures thus had to be understood as part of a conservative attempt to police a racial formation in crisis.

Half a decade later, Hall’s incisive analysis of these ‘iron times’ speaks urgently to ongoing debates about the migrant ‘crisis’ in Europe. Where critical security scholars largely have approached this topic through the deracinated lens of biopolitics, governmentality and securitization theory, a Hall-inspired conjunctural analysis reveals the expansion of the European border regime as a hegemonic strategy of racialized crisis management; in short, as ‘indicative of an emerging crisis of hegemony and a failure of the ruling classes to produce consent to their authority’ (Jefferson, 2014: 155). To think with Hall and do a policing of the crisis *now* is therefore to look beyond the European migrant ‘crisis’ and to examine the relationship between racism, mobility controls and changing forms of capitalist political economy. The intensification of state violence, fortification of borders and expansion of the deportation regime should not be seen as inevitable responses to unprecedented levels of migration: rather, they are a revanchist attempt to police a racial formation in crisis. The migrant ‘crisis’ is ultimately the result of one racialized world order collapsing, and another struggling to be born.

Acknowledgements

This article emerged from numerous conversations with Sabrina Axster, Adam Almakroudi, Evelyn Pauls and my third-year students at the University of Sussex. Andrew Delatolla, Joanne Yao, the editors and two anonymous reviewers read and commented on various drafts of the article. A special thank you to Keith Feldman, who inspired me to think with Stuart Hall.

Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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Notes

1. While hostile immigration policies are most commonly associated with xenophobic parties on the far right, they also find support on the social democratic left. See, for example, Nagle (2018) and Streeck (2016).
2. I am, of course, not the first to argue that Hall's work is helpful for understanding the present moment. See, for example, Casas-Cortes et al. (2015), Elliott-Cooper et al. (2014), Featherstone (2017), Rodríguez (2018), Valluvan and Kalra (2019) and Virdee and McGeever (2018).
3. In the UK, for example, detention figures have risen sharply since the 1990s from the low hundreds. From 2009 to 2017, between 2500 and 3500 migrants were in detention at any point in time; on a yearly basis, the UK detained just under 30,000 people (Silverman and Griffiths, 2018). Deportation figures have witnessed a similar rise: between 2010 and 2015, around 40,000–45,000 people were deported annually (Blinder, 2017).
4. There are, of course, several scholars who have highlighted the role of race in the securitization of migrants (Gray and Franck, 2019; Thorleifsson, 2017). Nonetheless, race typically appears as an after-thought rather than as something which is central to the analysis.
5. As Grossberg (2019: 42) explains, a conjuncture 'is located between the specificity of the moment and the long durée of the epoch'. Featherstone (2017: 38) similarly defines Hall's method of conjunctural analysis as a 'commitment to understanding how social relations and underlying historical processes came together in particular contexts, and to engage with politics as it actually existed on the ground'.
6. The concept of 'moral panic' was originally developed by Stanley Cohen (2011) to explain stereotypical media representations of British youth subcultures. Hall and his co-authors built on this concept to examine moral panics as representative of underlying crisis in hegemony.
7. To the contrary, the majority of European cases of sexual assault do not involve migrants; in Germany in 2015, migrants were responsible for only 3.6% of all sexual offences. Sexual violence is a pressing problem throughout Europe, but in the absolute majority of cases is perpetrated by someone already known by the victim; a father, friend, relative, colleague and so on. In fact, and according to the WHO, the numbers for non-partner sexual violence are higher in Western Europe than they are in North Africa and the Middle East. A 2014 study (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014) on violence against women found that in a sample of 10,000 interviewed German women, 37% had experienced at least one form of physical attack or threat by a partner or non-partner.
8. These representations are obviously not new but draw on a racial–sexual repertoire which historically has depicted black and brown men as sexual deviants preying on white women (Davis, 2019; McClintock, 2013).
9. As David Roediger (1999: 13) explains, the privileges conferred by whiteness could 'be used to make up for alienating and exploitative class relationships'. Hazel Carby (2019: 26) has similarly argued that 'imperialism, as it was experienced "at home", worked to glue together a society otherwise sharply divided by class'.

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